

It is sad and ironic that a man who spent so much of his life defending others from danger, in the end, died from a common enemy that too many of our fellow citizens continue to deny, thus giving the virus an opportunity to replicate and wreak havoc. We are not each other's enemies; the virus is the enemy.

Today, it claimed the life of an American statesman. By this time tomorrow, it will have taken another 1,500 family members, neighbors, heroes to many.

Especially for young children who can't be vaccinated yet and for the millions of Americans with compromised immune systems, we really have to increase our vaccine rates.

CONGRATULATING THE CHICAGO SKY

Madam President, last night, the world discovered that in Chicago, the sky is the limit. Our city of Chicago is home to a new team of champions.

During the Women's National Basketball Association finals at Wintrust Arena, the Chicago Sky mounted a comeback for the ages. In the fourth quarter, the team overcame an 11-point deficit to claim their first-ever championship title. The victory was the culmination of a historic season. Their record in the regular season was a mediocre 16 and 16, but in the runup for the playoffs, the Chicago Sky won 8 postseason games, an alltime record for the WNBA. And from start to finish, last night's victory was truly a team effort.

Hometown hero Candace Parker scored 16 points—she is nothing short of amazing—including a three-pointer that tied the game with less than 2 minutes left, sending the arena into an uproar. Kahleah Copper was named the WNBA finals MVP. Allie Quigley, a Joliet native, scored 26 points, and her wife and fellow teammate, Courtney Vandersloot, finished the game with 15 assists.

All-around, last night's victory was a legendary feat for the Chicago Sky. Tomorrow, our city will celebrate our new hometown champs in Millennium Park.

I want to thank every member of the Chicago Sky for making Skytown proud, especially Michael Alter and John Rogers, two personal friends who brought the franchise to Chicago and have worked diligently to make it the best every step of the way. Last night, they did. It is an inspiration to our city and to all the young players everywhere who want to look to a team that proves you should never quit.

NOMINATION OF GUSTAVO A. GELPI

Finally, Madam President, today the Senate will vote to confirm Gustavo Gelpi to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Judge Gelpi is a highly qualified jurist who has two decades of experience on the bench. When confirmed, he will be only the second judge of Hispanic origin and the second judge from Puerto Rico to serve on the First Circuit.

I would like to take just a moment to discuss his extensive qualifications and

experience. Throughout his career, Judge Gelpi has dedicated himself to public service. Prior to his appointment to the bench, he gained a keen understanding of the need for fairness and impartiality in our system of justice. He worked as a public defender as well as prosecutor. He served in the Puerto Rican Department of Justice, where he handled criminal matters on behalf of the attorney general of Puerto Rico.

In 2001, Judge Gelpi was selected to serve as magistrate judge for the District of Puerto Rico. Five years later, his impressive judicial record caught the attention of President George W. Bush, who nominated him to serve as district judge for the District of Puerto Rico. With Senate Republicans in the majority, Judge Gelpi's nomination received unanimous support in both the Senate Judiciary Committee and on the floor of the Senate.

Having served as a Federal judge for 20 years, Judge Gelpi is eminently qualified to sit on the First Circuit. He has already presided over 3,400 cases, 62 jury trials, and issued almost 900 written opinions.

He is a real judge. He is well versed in both complex and civil criminal matters and was rated unanimously "well qualified" by the American Bar Association.

Judge Gelpi's nomination is yet another example of the Biden administration and Senate Democrats working to advance judicial nominees to bring professional and demographic diversity to the Federal bench. The fact that Judge Gelpi has been nominated by both Republican and Democratic Presidents is almost historic and is certainly a testament to his evenhandedness and fidelity to the rule of law. Leaders on both sides of the aisle trust that he will rule impartially and without regard for partisanship.

Once he is confirmed as only the second judge of Hispanic origin to serve on the First Circuit, Judge Gelpi will help build a Federal bench that truly reflects the diversity of America. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting Judge Gelpi's nomination.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, earlier this month, Attorney General Garland released a memo instructing Department of Justice employees to respond to increasingly passionate school board meetings across the country. That memo talks about working to stop the violence and the threats of violence. That part of it is very fine, but

unfortunately the memo makes it sound like the Department of Justice might want to go after much more than just violence.

Over the last year, school board meetings have turned from relatively calm, local affairs to often boisterous meetings that are seen across the country. This began with parents who were upset after schools were being closed last year well after we learned that they could safely reopen in spite of COVID-19. Then these meetings grew to include pushback against mask mandates for students and against school districts adopting a curriculum known as critical race theory.

There are many parents across the country who are upset about these things, and that is their right, to be upset about them and to talk about them all they want to—after all, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly.

So here is the issue. The Attorney General's memo spoke of violence and threats of violence. Make no mistake about it—violence should never be used to get what you want in politics. It is illegal for a good reason, and making real, true threats is illegal as well. They scare people, and that is not right. No one should ever threaten someone with violence just because they are angry about some school policy.

Unfortunately, however, the Department of Justice memo goes further than that. A person reading it might think that a parent can't speak—really speak his or her mind at a school board meeting; that spirited debate is not welcome; that very pointed and direct questions from educators to school board members aren't welcome; that deep disagreements are not welcome. Parents coming and speaking to their local school boards is what our democracy is all about—the essence of our representative system of government. Whether it is Congress, State legislatures, city hall, or school boards, we ought to be able to have civil discussion, and nobody ought to question that civil discussion.

Of course, democracy also includes very passionate disagreements. If an elected official can't handle a passionate disagreement, then he or she shouldn't go into politics in the first place. That goes for the President; that goes for this Senator; and that goes for every member on every school board in the country.

Elected officials don't go crying to the FBI when constituents tell them something—how they are really feeling on an issue—regardless of how strong that feeling might be.

If a parent is passionately advocating for her child at a school board meeting and school officials tell her she is out of line, the parent should not have to worry that the FBI is going to pay her a visit in her home after that meeting.

She should not have to wonder whether the PATRIOT Act is going to be used to investigate her. It should never even cross that person's mind. If

it does, then she might just stop talking altogether at a meeting, and there would be a chilling effect on democracy.

That chilling effect is a very bad thing for democracies. In other words, it should never happen in the first place. So it is critically important for the Attorney General to make very clear to everybody that, short of violence and making true threats of violence, the Federal Government will have nothing to do with the crowds and the comments that people make at a school board meeting.

All of my Republican colleagues on the Senate Judiciary Committee and I sent a letter to the Attorney General telling him just that. He should make clear to all Americans that, unless there is physical violence or a threat of physical violence, Federal law enforcement has nothing to do with local school board meetings; and he ought to take into consideration the capability of local law enforcement to take care of it in the first place.

BIOFUELS

Madam President, on another subject, I would like to speak to an issue that is hurting the pocketbooks of hard-working Americans, particularly in the State of Iowa.

The media has reported that the White House has been in discussions with Big Oil regarding rising fuel prices. This is quite a surprise to some of us who have heard nothing from the administration all year; that we have got to stop fossil fuels and we have got to worry more about global warming. We shouldn't stop Big Oil, but you still have got to worry about global warming.

President Biden has called on OPEC cartels to drill for additional crude oil and discussed potentially opening up our domestic Strategic Petroleum Reserve. With rising energy prices, it is commonsense to promote additional development of energy; but with the Biden administration's sole focus seemingly being on climate change, I would think more attention would be paid to promoting an emphasis upon clean energy.

Throughout my tenure in the Senate, I have promoted alternative energy sources as a way of protecting our environment and increasing our energy independence. As the No. 1 producer of corn, ethanol, and biodiesel, Iowa leads the Nation's renewable fuels industry.

But if the President doesn't care about Iowa—my State of Iowa—the President should remember the States of Illinois and Minnesota, just as an example. Historically, blue States are also major producers of corn and soybeans, as well as ethanol and biodiesel.

A recent study has shown the expanded use of ethanol under the renewable fuel standard has lowered gasoline prices by an average of 22 cents per gallon. This saves the typical American household \$250 annually. In recent weeks, E-10, which is a 10-percent mixture of ethanol and gasoline, has sold

for 35 cents to 50 cents per gallon less than gasoline with no ethanol.

Not only is ethanol-blended gas cheaper than non-ethanol gasoline, but a recent study has also shown that ethanol reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 43 percent compared to conventional gasoline.

Considering President Biden's sudden interest in high gasoline prices, a commonsense solution would be to turn to the biofuel industry for assistance in this time of high gasoline prices.

Enhancing energy security while lowering emissions was the exact reason why Congress created the renewable fuel standard in 2005 and 2007. The Midwest has the potential to provide a solution to the multifaceted problems that this administration faces.

Instead, President Biden and his White House continue—it seems to me—to turn to Big Oil to solve the energy crisis instead of looking at the renewable fuels opportunities. Big Oil seems to then have a friendly relationship with the White House, which is completely contrary to what you would think of when they want to do away with fossil fuels.

Recent rumors in the press are saying that the administration is considering gutting the renewable fuel standard with massive cuts to the required volume obligations. This is strange considering President Biden campaigned on supporting the renewable fuel standard. He campaigned in Iowa as a friend of ethanol—yes, in Iowa.

President Biden said that “the Renewable Fuel Standard marks our bond with our farmers and our commitment to a thriving rural economy.”

Increased drilling for crude oil and increasing our dependence on OPEC is not a solution to higher prices at the pumps.

Why ask OPEC to pump more oil? Why ask Big Oil to pump more oil?

Americans need relief, and that relief can come from having a partnership with the biofuels industry, and it is past time for the administration to look to the heartland instead of Texas and OPEC for an answer.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING COLIN POWELL

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I begin today with the news that General Colin Powell, who served our Nation as the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the first African-American Secretary of State, passed away this morning at 84.

General Powell leaves behind a distinguished trailblazing legacy. Born in

Harlem to Jamaican parents, he grew up with a sister and his parents in South Bronx. He graduated from Melrose High School in the Bronx in 1954. At City College, his life changed forever when he joined the school's ROTC program, quickly becoming a standout member and earning his commission as Second Lieutenant in the Army after graduation.

From humble beginnings, General Powell's career broke one glass ceiling after another. His life was a manifestation of the American dream, a true American success story.

I join all Americans in remembering General Powell's life and his dedication to the country we love.

My thoughts are with his wife Alma, his three children, and his entire family.

SENATE AGENDA

Madam President, we begin a consequential work period for the U.S. Senate. Later today, we are going to move forward on the nomination of Gustavo Gelpi to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

If confirmed today, I believe Judge Gelpi will be only the second American citizen from Puerto Rico to be appointed to that court in its history. I cannot think of a better individual to succeed the late Judge Torruella.

Judge Gelpi is a proven champion of civil rights and a defender of the rule of law. He began his career in Puerto Rico's office as a Federal defender. In 2006, he was unanimously confirmed as a district judge for Puerto Rico.

He brings both personal and professional diversity to the bench at a time when we desperately need both. I am proud to have championed his nomination, and look forward to his confirmation today.

VOTING RIGHTS

Madam President, on voting rights, this week, the Senate will have an opportunity to engage in a momentous and urgent debate protecting the right to vote in free and fair elections.

Later this evening, I will begin the process for the Senate to consider the Freedom to Vote Act, a powerful new bill designed to fortify our democracy, protect the vote, and renew the American people's trust in our elections. After I file cloture tonight on the motion to proceed, Members can expect the vote to take place on Wednesday.

The Freedom to Vote Act is a balanced, effective, and commonsense bill. It sets basic standards for all Americans to vote safely and securely, while protecting elections from subversion. It fights back against the power of Big Money and ends partisan gerrymandering, while respecting the role of States in carrying out elections.

The bill represents the first time every single Senate Democrat has united on voting rights legislation. It is a strong bill. It advances election reforms proven to work in red, blue, and purple States across the country.

I thank my colleagues—all of my colleagues—for the work in putting this